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# A Statistical Profile of Substate Regional Organizations

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# A Statistical Profile of Substate Regional Organizations

## SUMMARY

The characteristics of multicounty substate agencies that help local governments to plan and to coordinate services differ significantly between urban and rural areas. Analysis of data from the 1977 Census of Governments shows that of 607 such agencies, 340 were headquartered in nonmetropolitan areas.

Nonmetropolitan agencies served much smaller average populations, mainly because of the lower population densities of rural areas. Because they served fewer people, nonmetropolitan agencies spent more per person, even though their average revenues were 60 percent less. Per capita revenues of both reflect a greater reliance on regional organizations in these areas.

Both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan organizations depend heavily on Federal funding. The average regional agency received nearly two-thirds of its support from Federal grants, about a fourth from local governments, and the rest, about a tenth, from State governments. Metropolitan regional organizations were more likely to receive their Federal aid directly from the Federal Government; nonmetropolitan agencies, by contrast, received larger shares on a pass-through basis from the State government.

Metropolitan regional organizations spent relatively more of their budgets for transportation and environmental protection, while nonmetropolitan agencies placed more emphasis on economic development, land use and conservation, and human resources programs.

Metropolitan regional organizations employed twice as many full-time employees as those in nonmetropolitan areas. However, nonmetropolitan agencies employed more employees per capita because they served considerably smaller average populations. Average salary levels were usually higher for full-time employees of metropolitan regional organizations.





# A Statistical Profile of Substate Regional Organizations

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the differing characteristics of substate regional organizations that serve metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. Substate regional organizations--those planning and service coordinating agencies serving entire metropolitan areas or groups of rural counties--are a relatively recent attempt of the Federal Government to help local governments provide public services. Hundreds were created between 1965 and 1975, although only a few existed prior to 1960. At present, these regional agencies provide planning, economic development, and service coordination throughout most of the United States.

An increasing number of Federal aid programs (5, 7) 1/ have enabled regional organizations to expand their functions and role in providing public services. This is particularly true in rural areas, where substate regional organizations have helped small and scattered local governments to compete more effectively for Federal dollars and to promote development.

Despite their acknowledged importance, these organizations--neither private agencies nor wholly governmental in character--are not well understood. Although much written about (6, 8), they have received less systematic study than they deserve (however, see 1, 2). In particular, a number of differences in the operations and functions of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan regional organizations have been postulated (7, pp. 7-12) that have not been tested empirically. This report attempts to fill this gap in understanding.

The analysis draws on data collected in a special survey of regional organizations conducted by the Census Bureau as part of the 1977 Census of Governments and released in 1978 (9). The next release of such data will occur in 1983. The survey, the first conducted on a nationwide scale, extended to 1,932 regional organizations and included a variety of institutions ranging from general-purpose organizations "primarily engaged in multijurisdictional planning, coordination, and policy discussion" (9, p. 1) to single-purpose organizations, such as

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1/ Underscored numbers in parentheses refer to items in the Literature Cited section at the end of this report.



community action agencies, area agencies on aging, health systems agencies, and criminal justice planning agencies.

This study focuses on general-purpose regional organizations, which includes such organizations as regional planning councils, councils of governments, economic development districts, and regional planning commissions. General-purpose regional agencies usually provide multiple services that range from land use to economic development to technical assistance to local governments. Unlike the special-purpose regional agencies, they often combine the use of several Federal categorical grants that support a variety of individual services. Typically, these organizations deal with diverse issues on an interjurisdictional basis, emphasizing planning and coordination rather than the actual delivery of services.

Many States have encouraged the formation and growth of general regional organizations by delineating substate planning areas and providing statutory authority for their operations. The Federal Government also has strongly supported their development through both funding and administrative regulations (7, pp. 17-26).

This report supplements an earlier report (4) that compared the characteristics of regional councils in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. That report (based on data reported by the National Association of Regional Councils) presented information on the age, funding, population size, governing board composition, and official program designations of 663 regional councils. This study parallels the earlier report in some respects; however, the availability of more detailed Census Bureau data permits the examination of each characteristic in greater depth.

The Census Bureau's survey included 675 general purpose regional organizations; of these, 607 returned questionnaires. For this analysis, the responding organizations were classified into several categories to reflect the location of their headquarters (table 1). Metropolitan organizations, headquartered within a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) 2/, were subdivided according to the size of the SMSA: "greater" metropolitan areas included those with more than 1 million residents; "medium" SMSA's had populations of between 250,000 and 1 million; and "smaller" SMSA's had fewer than 250,000 residents. Regional

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2/ An SMSA is a county or group of contiguous counties which contains at least one city of 50,000 inhabitants or more, or twin cities with a combined population of at least 50,000. Contiguous counties are included in an SMSA if, according to certain criteria, they are socially and economically integrated with the central city.

organizations headquartered beyond metropolitan areas were further classified into those in counties adjacent or not adjacent to SMSA's. <sup>3/</sup>

## CHARACTERISTICS

Regionalism originated in metropolitan areas and, although large-scale Federal support for regionalism did not begin until the sixties, nearly 12 percent of the metropolitan organizations had already been created by 1960 (table 1). Nearly three-fourths had been established by 1970. In contrast, less than 3 percent of the nonmetropolitan regional organizations originated before 1960 and almost half were not started until the seventies.

Among metropolitan organizations, a larger proportion of those in greater SMSA's date from the fifties or before. On the other hand, nonmetropolitan organizations headquartered the greatest distance from a metropolitan area were the most likely to have been created during the seventies.

<sup>3/</sup> The classification is based on a more elaborate classification reported in (3). SMSA definitions are as of 1973. In most cases, "adjacency" of nonmetropolitan counties is determined by physical contiguity; however, some exceptions are made where physical barriers (such as mountains) prevent the economic or social integration of contiguous counties.

Table 1--General regional organizations, by year of establishment and metropolitan status

Metropolitan status of headquarters	Total	1926-59	1960-69	1970-77
	Number	Percent		
Metro	267	11.7	61.1	27.4
Greater	53	17.0	56.6	26.5
Medium	110	9.1	65.5	25.5
Small	104	11.6	58.7	29.8
Nonmetro	340	2.4	50.6	47.1
Adjacent to SMSA	127	3.2	62.2	34.7
Not adjacent to SMSA	213	1.9	43.7	54.5
Total	607	6.5	55.2	38.4



Location

Table 2 illustrates the number and location of organizations. The South and North Central regions have over 200 organizations each. <sup>4/</sup> The Northeast, with 88, has the fewest. In contrast to those in the Northeast and the South, most of the organizations in the West and the North Central States are headquartered in nonmetropolitan counties. Perhaps reflecting their greater size, nonmetropolitan areas have somewhat more general regional organizations than metropolitan areas. Most of these organizations are headquartered in counties not adjacent to an SMSA.

Population Served

Metropolitan regional organizations serve five times as many residents as the average nonmetropolitan organization (table 3). While both the Northeast and North Central regions closely fit the national pattern, the differences are much larger in the West, where metropolitan organizations serve an average of over 13 times as many residents as nonmetropolitan organizations; by contrast, metropolitan and nonmetropolitan organizations in the South are more nearly alike than any other region.

Regional bodies within the largest SMSA's serve the largest average populations, due to their tendency to serve the whole SMSA. For the same reason, regional bodies within smaller SMSA's serve fewer residents on the average.

Consistent size differences also exist among nonmetropolitan organizations. Both nationally and in each Census region, organizations headquartered in counties adjacent to an SMSA serve larger average populations than organizations centered farther from an urban center. However, this population size difference is modest and averages only 17 percent nationally. The difference is greatest in the more sparsely settled West.

## FINANCES

Metropolitan and nonmetropolitan regional organizations differ in levels and sources of revenues and the way they spend them.

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<sup>4/</sup> The four Census regions consist of the following States: Northeast--Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont; North Central--Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin; South--Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia; West--Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

Table 2--General regional organizations, by region and metropolitan status, 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	United States	Northeast	North Central	South	West
	<u>Number</u>				
Metro	267	48	81	105	33
Greater	53	16	18	10	9
Medium	110	20	31	46	13
Small	104	12	32	49	11
Nonmetro	340	40	124	102	74
Adjacent to SMSA	127	17	48	39	23
Not adjacent to SMSA	213	23	76	63	51
Total	607	88	205	207	107

Table 3--Average population served by general regional organizations, by region and metropolitan status, 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	United States	Northeast	North Central	South	West
	<u>Thousands</u>				
Metro	612	601	600	508	989
Greater	1,579	1,030	1,588	1,426	2,707
Medium	503	440	429	586	482
Small	234	296	209	247	183
Nonmetro	122	101	108	181	75
Adjacent to SMSA	134	108	113	197	90
Not adjacent to SMSA	115	96	105	172	69
Total	337	374	302	347	357

## Revenue Levels

On the average, nonmetropolitan organizations raise nearly 1.5 times as much revenue per person as metropolitan organizations (table 4). Average per capita revenues are particularly high for regional organizations headquartered in counties not adjacent to an SMSA. However, organizations serving small SMSA's in the South and West also have relatively high per capita revenues. Per capita revenues usually tend to be lower within larger SMSA's than in regional organizations serving less heavily urbanized areas.

There are also significant differences in per capita revenues between the regions. Average per capita revenues are highest in the West and the South, both in total and among the regional organizations serving each population category, which suggests that regional agencies are more active in those regions than in the Northeastern and North Central States. Based on their comparatively low per capita revenues, regional organizations appear to be the weakest in the North Central region.

The higher levels of per capita revenues enjoyed by nonmetropolitan organizations are more a function of the small populations served than of large annual budgets. In fact, the average nonmetropolitan organization had annual revenues totaling

Table 4--Average per capita revenues of general regional organizations, by region and metropolitan status, 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters:	United States	Northeast	North Central:	South	West
	:	:	<u>Dollars</u>	:	:
Metro	: 2.25	1.20	1.35	3.23	2.86
Greater	: 1.25	1.44	.68	1.74	1.49
Medium	: 1.55	.95	1.32	1.90	1.79
Small	: 3.50	1.30	1.76	4.78	5.24
	:	:	:	:	:
Nonmetro	: 3.36	3.62	1.56	4.00	5.36
Adjacent to SMSA	: 2.84	3.17	1.00	4.07	4.34
Not adjacent to SMSA:	3.66	3.94	1.91	3.95	5.81
	:	:	:	:	:
Total	: 2.87	2.30	1.47	3.60	4.58
	:	:	:	:	:

Note: Figures are unweighted averages and indicate the per capita revenues of the average regional organization in each category.



\$366,000, or less than 40 percent of the average for all metropolitan area organizations in 1977 (table 5). The average revenues of regional organizations increase with the urbanization and population of the area. Annual revenues from all sources totaled over \$1.5 million for organizations serving the largest SMSA's, an amount nearly twice as large as the average revenues of organizations headquartered in medium-sized SMSA's.

### Revenue Sources

General regional organizations derived an average of 63 percent of their revenues from the Federal Government in 1977 (table 5). Just under half of the Federal dollars received by the average organization are passed through to it by the State government; of the remainder, most are granted directly by the Federal Government, although a small percentage of Federal funds are first granted to a local government. Contributions from local governments comprise about a fourth of the average organization's revenues, about 10 percent comes from State tax sources, and a small percentage is derived from miscellaneous sources.

Metropolitan regional organizations tend to rely on the Federal Government and on local governments, while nonmetropolitan organizations receive more of their support from the States; however, the differences are not large. More significant is the propensity for metropolitan organizations to receive Federal aid directly from the Federal Government, while nonmetropolitan organizations more often receive it on a pass-through basis from the State.

Organizations serving the largest SMSA's obtain a much higher percentage of their resources from miscellaneous sources than other regional organizations, which may indicate either greater innovation in raising revenues or broader legal authority to adopt methods not available to smaller organizations. Nonmetropolitan agencies adjacent to SMSA's tend to receive a larger share of revenues from local governments, while those located farther from SMSA's rely more heavily on Federal aid.

### Sources of Federal Aid

Metropolitan regional organizations usually rely on different Federal agencies. This reflects the differences in both the mix of problems that urban and rural areas must face and the political coalitions that are allied with the interests of these areas (table 6). The largest supporter of these organizations, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provided nearly a quarter of the Federal aid received by the average regional agency. Those organizations serving the largest SMSA's and nonmetropolitan areas not adjacent to an SMSA rely on HUD the least and nonmetropolitan agencies headquartered adjacent to an SMSA depend on HUD the most.

Table 5—Revenues of general regional organizations, by source and metropolitan status, 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	Average total revenues	Revenues from Federal Government			Revenues from State and local government			Revenues from other sources		
		Total	Direct	Through State and local government	Total	State	Local	From State and local government	From other sources	Other
	1,000									
	dollars									
Metro	929	64.1	32.3	25.7	3.1	8.0		24.3		3.2
Greater	1,570	58.3	32.3	14.5	5.0	8.7		25.3		7.7
Medium	817	64.7	31.9	26.9	3.1	7.6		25.1		1.7
Small	720	66.4	32.6	30.7	2.0	8.1		23.1		2.5
Nonmetro	366	62.5	20.5	35.2	2.1	12.2		22.2		2.9
Adjacent to SMSA	377	57.9	17.2	31.2	2.3	10.1		29.4		2.7
Not adjacent to SMSA	359	65.2	22.6	37.7	1.9	13.4		17.9		3.0
Total	613	63.2	25.6	31.1	2.5	10.3		23.1		3.0

Note: Percentages are unweighted averages and indicate the percentage of revenues obtained by the average organization in each category. Figures will not necessarily add to 100 percent.

Table 6--Federal aid to general regional organizations, by Federal agency and metropolitan status, 1977

Federal agency	Total	Metro			Nonmetro		
		Total	Greater	Medium	Small	Total	Adjacent to SMSA
							Not adjacent to SMSA
Average percentage of Federal aid from each agency							
Dept. of Agriculture	0.3	0.2	1/	0.1	0.5	0.4	0.2
Dept. of Commerce	13.7	7.2	3.6	7.6	8.6	18.8	13.1
Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare	11.3	9.0	4.5	9.9	10.4	13.1	12.8
Dept. of Housing and Urban Development	24.6	24.6	20.4	25.0	26.4	24.5	28.0
Dept. of Interior	.3	.3	.1	.2	.5	.3	.2
Dept. of Justice	5.6	5.0	5.1	5.7	4.3	6.1	5.7
Dept. of Labor	8.8	7.4	4.2	5.3	11.4	9.9	11.1
Dept. of Transportation	10.8	20.6	25.3	21.8	16.9	3.2	2.9
Environmental Protection Agency	9.7	15.4	22.6	14.4	12.9	5.1	6.8
All other	8.6	5.4	3.1	5.5	6.3	11.2	6.5

Note: Percentages are unweighted averages and indicate the percentage of Federal aid received from each Federal agency by the average organization in each category. Figures will not necessarily add to 100 percent.

1/ Less than 0.05 percent.



The second largest source of Federal dollars, the Department of Commerce, accounts for just under 14 percent of Federal aid to these agencies. The Commerce Department's assistance (provided mainly to agencies designated as economic development districts) is concentrated in nonmetropolitan areas (especially the most rural portions). Agencies serving the largest SMSA's derive less than 4 percent of their Federal aid from the Commerce Department compared with almost 25 percent for agencies headquartered in rural counties. The same is true of support from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) 5/, which assists regional organizations under a number of programs, such as assistance to area-wide agencies on aging. 6/ The Department of Labor also accounts for a slightly larger share of Federal aid to nonmetropolitan organizations, although the difference is not too great.

Two agencies, the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are more important sources of Federal aid for metropolitan organizations. For all metropolitan organizations, DOT and EPA account for 21 and 15 percent of revenues, respectively, compared with 3 percent and 5 percent among nonmetropolitan organizations. Together, these two Federal agencies comprise nearly half of the Federal aid for regional organizations in the greater SMSA's; however, they are less important in the smaller metropolitan areas.

Finally, a few other agencies also contribute support to regional organizations, although they do not provide a large proportion of the total. The Department of Justice--through its Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA)--provides an average of about 6 percent of all Federal aid to regional organizations. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior also provide very small amounts of aid. 7/

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5/ HEW has since been divided into the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services.

6/ While these agencies may be separate single-purpose organizations, general regional organizations often perform this function.

7/ While the Department of Agriculture has administered several programs assisting substate regional organizations (6, pp. 5-6), some of this aid goes to special purpose regional agencies and is not reflected in these figures. The Department's main program of support for general regional agencies was not funded until fiscal year 1978, the year after the Census Bureau's survey was conducted.

Spending by Function In terms of budget allocations (table 7), economic and community development functions were the most significant areas emphasized, closely followed by land use and conservation and human resources programs. Less emphasis was given to environmental and transportation issues.

Both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan organizations spent the largest share of their budgets for economic development. However, there were some significant differences in spending on other functions. Organizations in larger SMSA's place greater relative emphasis on transportation and environmental issues. In smaller SMSA's, these functions take a back seat to human resources, economic development, and land use, even though they are still considerably more important than in nonmetropolitan areas.

The average nonmetropolitan regional organization devoted almost 70 percent of its budget to three functions: economic development, land use and conservation, and human resources. A far smaller part of its expenditures were devoted to the environmental protection and transportation functions so important to densely populated metropolitan areas.

#### EMPLOYMENT AND SALARIES

The average regional organization employs 23 full-time persons (table 8). However, this figure obscures rather large differences between the organizations serving metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The average metropolitan regional organization employs 33 full-time employees, while those in nonmetropolitan areas averaged only 14.

Regional organizations in the South--generally acknowledged to be the Nation's strongest--employed an average of 36 persons, almost twice as many as the 19 employed in the West, which had the next highest average. Among nonmetropolitan organizations, those in the South employed about 1.5 times as many people as those in the West and almost 3 times the average in North Central States. They also averaged as many or more full-time employees as metropolitan organizations in the Northeastern and North Central States.

Customarily, nonmetropolitan regional organizations had larger numbers of full-time employees relative to the population they served (table 9). With a few exceptions, the number of employees per 10,000 population declined as the average population of the areas served increased. The highest per capita employment levels are found in the West and South, and the lowest in the North Central States.

Table 7--Expenditures of general regional organizations,  
by function and metropolitan status, 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	Average total expenditures	Economic & community development	Land use and conservation	Human resources	Environment	Transportation	Other
	1,000 dollars						
Metro	940	18.9	17.7	16.5	16.0	18.0	13.0
Greater	1,668	14.0	18.8	7.9	21.2	22.0	16.1
Medium	813	19.3	16.2	14.3	16.7	19.4	13.1
Small	702	20.9	18.8	23.1	12.6	14.4	11.2
Nonmetro	361	27.1	21.9	21.0	10.2	6.3	13.4
Adjacent to SMSA	369	24.0	24.8	21.1	10.6	7.4	12.1
Not adjacent to SMSA	357	28.9	20.2	20.9	9.9	5.6	14.1
Total	616	23.5	20.1	19.0	12.7	11.4	13.2

Note: Percentages are unweighted averages and indicate the percentage of expenditures made on each function by the average organization in each category. Figures will not necessarily add to 100 percent.



Table 8--Average number of full-time employees of general regional organizations, by region and metropolitan status, July 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	:United States	:Northeast	:North Central	:South	:West
	:				
	:		<u>Number</u>		
	:				
Metro	: 33	20	23	49	28
Greater	: 44	32	41	55	56
Medium	: 22	16	23	27	16
Small	: 39	12	13	67	18
	:				
Nonmetro	: 14	9	8	23	16
Adjacent to SMSA	: 17	10	5	32	20
Not adjacent to SMSA	: 13	8	10	18	14
	:				
Total	: 23	15	14	36	19
	:				

Table 9--Average number of full-time employees of general regional organizations per 10,000 population, by region and metropolitan status, July 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	:United States	:Northeast	:North Central	:South	:West
	:				
	:		<u>Number</u>		
	:				
Metro	: 1.09	0.57	0.59	1.87	0.61
Greater	: .47	.70	.30	.48	.40
Medium	: .51	.43	.63	.53	.33
Small	: 2.01	.63	.72	3.40	1.10
	:				
Nonmetro	: 1.45	1.62	.87	1.42	2.38
Adjacent to SMSA	: 1.39	1.25	.51	1.77	2.69
Not adjacent to SMSA	: 1.49	1.89	1.09	1.21	2.24
	:				
Total	: 1.29	1.05	.76	1.65	1.83
	:				

Note: Figures are unweighted averages and indicate the number of employees per 10,000 population for the average organization in each category.

Average salaries of full-time employees are about 12 percent higher in metropolitan areas (table 10). Nationally, the more urban the area served, the higher the average salary paid, with full-time employees in the largest SMSA's paid over 25 percent more than the average for employees in the most rural organizations. The same pattern is repeated in most of the individual Census regions. Average salaries are highest in the West and lowest in the North Central States.

Table 10--Average monthly salary of full-time employees of general regional organizations, by region and metropolitan status, July 1977

Metropolitan status of headquarters	:United States	:Northeast	: North Central	: South	: West
	:		<u>Number</u>		
	:				
Metro	: 1,066	1,076	1,034	1,029	1,247
Greater	: 1,201	1,142	1,085	1,192	1,549
Medium	: 1,088	1,097	1,014	1,133	1,092
Small	: 974	953	1,026	898	1,183
	:				
Nonmetro	: 948	940	895	975	1,005
Adjacent to SMSA	: 972	1,004	898	975	1,098
Not adjacent to SMSA	: 934	892	893	975	963
	:				
Total	: 1,000	1,014	950	1,002	1,080
	:				

Note: Figures are unweighted averages and indicate the average salary paid by the average organization in each category.

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